

# WHITE PAPER



## LEAD YOUR EMPLOYEES TO WATER AND URGE THEM TO DRINK!

### WORKER SAFETY: LEAD YOUR EMPLOYEES TO WATER AND URGE THEM TO DRINK!

WHILE IT MAY HAVE NO IMMEDIATELY  
VISIBLE OUTWARD SIGNS, DEHYDRATION  
CONTRIBUTES TO LOWER PERFORMANCE  
AND DECREASED WORKPLACE SAFETY.



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## **WHILE IT MAY HAVE NO IMMEDIATELY VISIBLE OUTWARD SIGNS, DEHYDRATION CONTRIBUTES TO LOWER PERFORMANCE AND DECREASED WORKPLACE SAFETY.**

*By Lynice Anderson*

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Some days are just better than others... you feel better, have more energy, think more clearly and you just don't sweat the small stuff. We've all had days like that and we'd like to have more. What creates the positive feeling that leads to a super day? It's probably mostly our attitude, maybe a good night's sleep or a positive occurrence early in the day that sets the tone for the ensuing hours. You feel like you can conquer the world... and, generally you can! Enhanced performance comes easy on those days.

There's a growing body of evidence that strongly suggests that one of the more significant contributors to our "good days" is our personal state of hydration. When the human body is properly hydrated, mental acuity, focus and energy levels are all at optimal levels. Our challenge as managers is to understand that dehydration has few apparent symptoms. Diminished performance may be the first clue of dehydration, but it might be attributed to other causes.

Assuring that you and your employees understand the personal signs of dehydration and the effects it can have on performance and safety is vital to maintaining a productive workforce. By making hydration facilities accessible to everyone during their workday, you are providing an essential tool for health maintenance. To paraphrase an old saying, "Lead your employees to water and urge them to drink!"

### **WHAT IS DEHYDRATION?**

The human body is nearly 60% water by weight. That means a 180-pound person would consist of 108 pounds in water weight alone. This is a remarkable amount of water and losing just a small amount can have devastating effects. Dehydration occurs when a person takes in substantially less fluid than they have lost. An average of 2.5 liters of water is lost each day just through normal body processes.

Typically water is lost through urination, respiration and sweating. Fluid loss can be amplified significantly if health issues result in vomiting or diarrhea. In these cases dehydration is likely to occur because fluids are usually not replenished right away. A big problem with dehydration is that it can occur without us being aware.

If you are feeling thirsty, you are likely already in some state of dehydration. The thirst sensation often presents after you have reached a dehydrated condition. So while thirst is an indicator that you need to drink something, it is likely you are already somewhat dehydrated.

### **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE BECOME DEHYDRATED?**

Studies have shown that dehydration can have a major impact on physical and mental performance. There is substantial data that suggests even mild cases of dehydration can have a significant impact on cognitive and physical ability. It is believed that a loss of 2-3% of total body water can result in as much as a 20% decrease in energy levels. It has also been shown that dehydration can be directly correlated to a diminished ability to concentrate.



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Concentration in the workplace is paramount, especially in jobs where people are working in dangerous environments, or with potentially dangerous tools. Recent studies have shown that as we become dehydrated our ability to focus diminishes, memorization becomes more difficult and hand-eye coordination decreases. It is not difficult to see how debilitating dehydration can be on workers.

Another detrimental effect of dehydration is that of perceived effort. Perceived effort is the effort that a worker feels it takes to perform a given task. In states of dehydration, perceived effort increases. This means that two workers can perform the same tasks, but the one who is dehydrated will perceive the work to be much more arduous than the person that is well hydrated. This perceived effort could lead to over-exertion and in thermally challenging environments possible heat related illness. This can have significant implications in the workplace. It is imperative that we safeguard our employees by giving them adequate access to clean, pure water. The signs of dehydration can be fairly evident, if we know what we are looking for and which questions to ask.

Signs and symptoms of dehydration include:

- Headaches
- Becoming easily irritated
- Feeling fatigued
- Having a dry mouth or feeling thirsty
- Dry or cracked lips
- Feeling intolerant of heat
- Having flushed skin
- Medium to dark urination
- Feeling light-headed
- Dry skin

#### **WHAT IF A WORKER IS FOUND TO BE DEHYDRATED IN THE FIELD?**

The first thing is to get the worker water immediately and then seek professional help. In severe cases, oral rehydration therapy (ORT) and intravenous fluids are used in rehydrating patients. A medical practitioner must perform this treatment. The medical treatment for rehydration is very individual and specific to the person being treated. It is best to give the dehydrated person some water to quench thirst and then seek a medical professional to determine the proper course of action.

#### **WHAT ARE SOME POTENTIAL LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS OF CHRONIC DEHYDRATION?**

There is emerging research in this area as more and more is learned about the acute health effects of dehydration. Dr. F. Batmanghelidj, an alternative health care practitioner, believed dehydration can lead to an increased risk of chronic health problems including:



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- Diabetes
  - Stroke
  - Gallstones
  - Kidney and bladder stone
  - Heart disease
  - Cancer
  - Thrombosis
  - Urinary tract infections
  - Periodontal diseases

There is no question that water is essential for life. There are a great many doctors that will tell you that drinking enough water is not only good for your health, but has other ancillary benefits as well. As they say, "An ounce of prevention goes a long way."

### **PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE**

Giving employees ready access to water is the key to keeping them hydrated. If water is plentiful and accessible, they will be more likely to utilize the resources and stay hydrated. Off-site workers or those in remote locations need not go thirsty. There are many opportunities for offering a continual water source that these employees will utilize. Here is a set of best practices you may consider:

1. Keep large jugs of water and ice readily available.
2. Ensure that the water is fresh, well-filtered and tastes good.
3. Ensure that water jugs are cleaned often to prevent bacterial growth.
4. Advise employees to drink water often, before work shifts, during breaks and whenever thirsty.
5. Encourage employees to bring their own water bottle to work, or provide them with one.
6. Provide ample restroom facilities to encourage continual hydration.
7. Create an education plan to remind your employees to get hydrated and stay hydrated. Inform personnel of the danger signs of dehydration and have them work in a "Buddy System" in order to provide support.
8. Make it a habit and lead by example.

It's estimated that 80% of the adult population in the U.S. go through their day somewhat dehydrated. One can assume that any decrease in performance related to dehydration is proportionate to the degree of dehydration. An investment of time in education and providing adequate drinking facilities is an inexpensive way to enhance the performance of your team!



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## ABOUT HAWS

Haws Corporation designs, manufactures and distributes drinking fountains and emergency equipment that are ranked #1 in quality by specifiers in both product categories.

*Lynice Anderson is a Registered Dietitian, Certified Diabetes Educator and Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics. Lynice has worked for Renown Health in Reno, Nevada for over 15 years and currently supervises daily operations in Health Management Services, an outpatient prevention and disease management department. She has a strong personal and professional interest in the role of nutrition and exercise in both disease prevention and management and enjoys educating clients on all aspects of nutrition and lifestyle intervention.*

## References

1. Batmanghelidj, F. MD. (2003). *Your body's many cries for water*. Virginia. Global Health Studios.

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